

Campus food for a mere fiver

by Ian I. Kelso

What can you buy for five dollars? It wasn't that long ago that a crisp Sir John A. could get you a Tuesday at the movies with a bucket of popcorn. Hell, I remember when I could buy five packs of cigarettes for a mere two twos and a one.

But what can you eat for five dollars? What can you eat at York for five dollars? That's what *Excalibur* sent me out to discover; so I said to myself, "It's free food... what the hey."

Ainger anger

Like a zombie from *Return of the Living Dead*, I headed straight for the north end of Atkinson College, to the Ainger.

All I could think of were those huge brown bagels, the succulently thick helpings of spicy cream cheese, the daring flora of the vegetarian chili, and all for so little money. My eyes must have been closed tight in anticipation, for I walked headlong into the Ainger's closed double doors. What the hell?

Then it hit me (not the door, but the fact) that my favorite funky cafe had been shut down forever. Apparently some acting administrator decided students had no business serving great food for competitive prices (see the news update on page 3).

It was at this point that I started to cry uncontrollably. Quite shaken up, I ventured forth.

Giving restaurants what they fear most

Before the Student Centre, there was no competition for student dollars. It was mostly a decision of whose grease was the least nauseating. But suddenly, from out of the blue, like a streak of light, arriving just in time, ten new restaurants came onto the scene and introduced to the York food capitalists what they feared most — competition.

I've left out Blueberry Hill and Sakura, both located in York Lanes. They weren't open in time for this *Excalibur*, though they're open now. As for the Student Centre fast food places... I mean hey, we all know what's there, right?

A grabbed my fistful of fivers and got ready to line up.

Central Square Cafeteria

(Elite Foods)
Central Square

This is the first place I ever ate at York University. I was with my parents. We didn't know any better.

The first thing I noticed was the additions to the menu. Of course, it's still just your basic greasy spoon: hamburgers, westerns, fish and chips, and several specials of the day which all seemed to include sausage. I asked the server to dish me out their most popular item.

My hamburger and fries with gravy were a mere \$3.05, so I decided to balance it out healthwise with a chocolate milk (\$.85). The burger was about a quarter pound of spiced beef served on a fresh sesame seed bun. The fries were nothing to write home about, and the gravy pretty much sucked the big one.

The prices were reasonable, and it remains the sole eating establishment on the vast ground floor of the Ross/Central Square/Curtis Complex. But, you can do better.

Grad Lounge

(Graduate Students' Association)
7th Floor, North Ross

One of my old hangouts. With a

bird's eye view of the central campus, good coffee and friendly staff, this has been one of York's few havens of good social intercourse for as many years as I can remember. And the food's not too bad either.

It dawned on me as I was ordering my meal that I had never tried anything more than the vegetable patties (\$.98) and coffee. This time I decided on the Lasagna Verdi (\$3.95) because it had the coolest sounding name and came with a side salad. Naturally, for drink, I had coffee.

The pasta was thick with both cottage and mozzarella cheeses and contained a hint of spinach. The side salad consisted of a mixture of romaine and head lettuce with sections of green pepper and onion. It was a tasty treat, but my stomach yearned for more.

I also tried a bit of their Veggie Cutlet (\$2.95), an interesting alternative to pork. I couldn't quite decipher what the veggies were though, and when I asked the server, well, she didn't know either.

Atkinson Cafeteria

(Petal Foods)

Basement, Atkinson College.

Return of the Greasy Spoon. Apart from the Faculty Club (where students aren't welcome anyway), this is the most expensive eatery on campus. Once known as the only place to buy a decent meal with scrip, good old Atkinson Caf has slid down the food chain.

As a rule of thumb, you can always judge a restaurant by the french fries they serve. Good fries means meticulous attention is paid to food quality. I know it isn't exactly a scientific method, but hey, got a better idea?

Atkinson used to serve the best fries on campus: always freshly cut, golden brown and slightly crispy. But now, alas, limp fries. There is hope, though.

Since the demise of the much cherished Ainger, Petal Foods has promised to pick up the slack by opening a new coffee shop featuring veggie chili, bagels and all the toppings. This will go up right on the sacred ground of the burial site of our beloved Ainger. We'll see...

As for the grub, I decided on the vegetarian chili (\$2.00) with a side dish of veggie rice (\$1.75) and a milk (\$.85). In the chili I counted eight (yes, I pick apart my food) types of vegetation. Not bad. The downside was the tomato base which tasted far too much like Campbell's (the soup, not the T.V. series). My rice was

definitely the dictionary definition of "heaping," but otherwise pretty average.

As for the atmosphere? The main bonus here is the nostalgic, almost anachronistic, homey feeling which emanates from the stainless steel counters, over the red vinyl seats and particleboard tables, around the brown plastic trays, into the...

Oh yeah, and it's also fully licensed.

Marriott Foods

Complex 1: Vanier/Founders and Winters

Complex 2: Bethune/Stong
Fine Arts Phase III

Residence students, like it or not, this is where you'll probably be eating most of your meals. As York's main caterer for the past four years, Marriott has garnered itself the reputation of serving the worst food in the western hemisphere. And expensive to boot.

None of their four locations were open for business as I was doing my rounds in August, but I did get a chance to speak to Stratis Catsiris, the Unit Manager.

Mr. Catsiris was not the type of manager I expected to find behind the counters of such a banal operation. The guy was actually pretty cool. He even admitted that in many cases Marriott serves the "same greasy food" as Central Square and Atkinson. However, Catsiris claims changes are being made.

Winters will be opening its doors this year as the only full vegetarian eatery. "The Greenery," as it will be called, will attempt to cater to the tastes of York herbivores. All of their locations will also feature the classic bagel and a variety of cream cheeses — yet another copy of the defunct Ainger. It will remain to be seen if these changes will be adequate or



Andrew Brouse

The Absinthe Pub, located in the basement of Winters College, has many secrets hidden in its dimly-lit depths. Absinthe is a liquor made from the juice of the wormwood tree. It is known to cause brain damage and is illegal in most countries.

permanent, but at least I got the idea that Stratis gave a shit.

So try it. If you don't think it's good enough, go talk to the guy. He might actually listen.

Open End Pub and Coffee Shop

Basement, Vanier College

This is one of those places where you pick up a bit of lunch on the fly. The management assures me they are razzing up their menu for the fall, so again I don't have the chance to get a true taste of what it will be like. Some of the fare to be offered will include: pizza, beef pies, tortellini, salads and veggie chili, all tailor-made for the End.

I did however have myself a bagel and cream cheese (\$1.50), a bowl of Campbell's cream of mushroom soup (\$1.35), and a Five Alive (\$.85). It wasn't a bad snack for under four bucks with tax.

As Yet Unnamed Restaurant and Club

Basement, Student Centre

Pretty spiffy! If you're really into being served by genteel types in shirts and ties, munching on blackened swordfish, and rubbing elbows over marble table tops, (that's right, La Scala is in our midst), you'll love this huge new joint.

Appearances aside, this place ain't a bad eat. The menu has it all, from artichoke and zucchini paté to chunky egg salad with potato chips, mostly under the five buck limit.

I had what is definitely the best deal in the house: the mini pasta and salad (\$2.69). It's hidden quite deceptively on the menu under the heading "Sides," though it is a meal in itself. The pasta comes with either an alfredo (white) sauce or a creole (tomato, spicy with veggies). I had the creole.

I expected a small dish of cold pasta in a cream-of-tomato soup sauce surrounded by rabbit food. Quelle surprise! The multi-coloured spiral pasta sat in a delicious heap in front of me. I began to wonder how the Student Centre could afford to lay out that much chow for under three bucks.

And how it tickled the old palate. The creole sauce was highly spiced, a clear contrast to the extra-super-bland recipes offered in most of York's gastronomic institutions. The salad was a mixture of romaine, red and green peppers, onions and the likes, nicely tossed in a tasty vinaigrette house dressing.

This place is a must for all. But will somebody please advise the serving staff to lose the ties! It would make everything a little easier to digest.

The Yet to be Named Restaurant and Club is my runner up as the best value for the dollar on campus.

On the Edge

Calumet College

Aha! I found it. On the far west end of campus, hidden behind the Stong/Bethune complex, in the weird new buildings which make up the new home of Calumet College, there it was. Deep in my heart, I knew the Ainger was alive and well and living under an assumed name.

My friend and I ate a nutritious and filling meal for under five bucks. A huge whole wheat bagel filled with my favorite spicy cream cheese with a side salad and home made dressing (\$1.90), tuna salad with lots of celery and onion in a bagel and veggies with dip (\$1.90), coffee in mug (\$.55) and a hot chocolate (\$.55).

On The Edge is my winner. For food, environmental awareness, service, and value, this place takes the prize.



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Students at the Central Square Cafeteria smile despite the less than mediocre fare. Maybe they are new and didn't know any better. As Ian Kelso points out, there are cheap places on campus that offer good food, you just have to know where to find them.